

Governor Markell issues executive order creating firearm suicide prevention task force

Multi-disciplinary group charged with raising public awareness and adding to existing statewide suicide prevention efforts

Wilmington, DE – Governor Markell announced today that he has signed an Executive Order that brings a diverse coalition of stakeholders together to reduce the number of suicides by firearm. It builds upon sustained work across Delaware over more than a decade to understand the many causes and factors that lead to suicide, raise awareness, and promote strategies to reduce suicide.

Nationally, fully half of all suicide deaths occur by firearm.

“Suicide tragically cuts short lives, while devastating families and having long-lasting effects on communities,” Governor Markell said. “While we have increased awareness and expanded suicide-prevention resources, we can do more. I’m particularly concerned by the number of these acts that involve the use of firearms and we have the opportunity to engage a wide range of advocates to find solutions that reduce the number of these tragedies. Together, I know that we can more effectively reach out to people in crisis to give them hope – and help – to overcome their feelings of despair.”

Nationally each year [more than 40,000 people take their lives through suicide](#). Suicide occurs disproportionately among young people, where it’s the 2nd highest cause of death, and among veterans, where the suicide rate is double that of the civilian population. Moreover, the number of suicide attempts for every suicide death is estimated to be [as high as 25:1](#)

[among youth](#). In addition to its tragic and devastating effects on families and communities, the annual financial impact of suicide nationwide runs in the tens of billions of dollars.

Each week, an average of more than 2 Delawareans take their lives through suicide. Each year across the First State, suicides surpass the number of motor vehicle deaths and nearly doubles the number of homicides.

Public Health officials, policymakers, and others have recognized that suicides are a significant, and preventable, public health problem, and by focusing additional attention on the challenge of firearm suicides, Governor Markell's Executive Order seeks to build upon the progress Delaware has made in addressing this issue. Since 2004, the Delaware Suicide Prevention Coalition has convened a diverse cross section of stakeholders to raise suicide awareness, provide education about the warning signs, and marshal tailored suicide prevention resources and services. Most recently, last month, [Governor Markell signed legislation](#) championed by Senate Pro Tempore Patricia Blevins, D-Elsmere, and others, which codified the Coalition in state law and extends its mission.

"Suicide is a preventable symptom of a larger problem, whether that's substance abuse, depression, PTSD, or some other trauma," Senator Blevins said. "More than half of all gun-related deaths in America are self-inflicted, and each day thousands of people—many of whom are veterans, or even our own kids—continue to suffer in silence. We owe it to them, to those we've lost, and to ourselves to take a scientific approach to suicide prevention, and Governor Markell understands that. I'm grateful for his action on this urgent issue, and I'm proud to be a part of the dialogue and the effort to find meaningful solutions."

Executive Order 63 creates the Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force which is charged with:

- Examining the current outreach, education and training about suicide to firearm owners
- Reviewing models and data from other state and local governments on effective public strategies for suicide prevention among firearm owners
- Developing recommendations to reduce suicides by firearms in Delaware
- Reviewing ways to connect mental health resources with at-risk populations, and
- Engaging firearm advocates, dealers and clubs in suicide prevention efforts

House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst has spearheaded several efforts to address suicide in Delaware in recent years, including requiring more suicide prevention training in schools and raising awareness for veterans who commit suicide by organizing a “22 in 22” awareness campaign. Rep. Longhurst pushed for a task force during the legislative session and approached Governor Markell this fall to create the group.

“Suicide is a silent epidemic that claims the lives of more than 42,000 people in our country each year. We need to bring this issue into the light, bring a voice to the problem and work to prevent suicides from happening,” said Rep. Longhurst, D-Bear. “Firearms account for half of all suicide deaths, so we need to take steps to not only raise awareness, but also address ways to reduce these suicides. That means engaging firearms owners, dealers and advocacy groups, because this is an issue that directly affects them. They have a huge stake in reducing firearm-related suicides, so we need them at the table working to tackle this epidemic. I look forward to working with all members in the coming months.”

This work on suicide prevention will also build on broader progress on gun safety, which has included better reporting of people with mental health challenges to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, expanding background checks to private sales, mandating reporting of lost and stolen

weapons and, this past year, closing another loophole that allowed people to acquire firearms without a background check.

Firearm Suicide Prevention Task Force members will include representatives from both houses of the General Assembly, the Commission of Veterans Affairs, the Delaware Sportsman Association, Delaware firearm dealers, representatives of suicide prevention organizations, public members, and the heads of the state departments of Health and Social Services, Kids, and Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

The Task Force will begin its work immediately and will report back to the General Assembly and Delaware Suicide Prevention Coalition by January 1, 2017.

[Read full text of Executive Order 63 here.](#)